

**Date:** May 11, 2021

**To:** Senate Rules Committee, Chair Wagner and members

**From:** Toya Fick

**RE:** Confirmation to Board of Trustees, University of Oregon

Chair Wagner and members of the Senate Rules committee:

Thank you for considering my appointment to the board of trustees for the University of Oregon.

I am a consensus-building and collaborative leader with a relentless focus on achieving measurable results for students. I will bring to the University of Oregon nearly 20 years of experience and executive leadership in education. Over the course of my career, I have developed a strong track record as an advocate with an unwavering commitment to equity. Further, my deep passion for and understanding of the state's preschool through college education system makes me highly qualified for an appointment to this board.

I believe that a high school diploma should be the ticket to a life that has options. That piece of paper is the starting line and has the power to set the foundation for a student's future. My lived experience provides a concrete example of what can happen to a child who reaches that starting line fully prepared for whatever comes next.

I grew up in a small, isolated town in Louisiana. The summer before I entered high school, my immediate family moved to Charlottesville, Virginia in search of a better life. I met with my new counselor on the very first day at my new school. Mr. Monahan made it clear to me that the goal of the educators and staff of my high school was to prepare students for the local university, the University of Virginia (UVA). He also explained that if I was not ready (for any reason) to start at UVA, I could go to the local community college for two years then transfer and graduate with all the new friends I was poised to make. He finished by saying: "you see, there are plenty of options once you graduate from high school." Then, he asked that I wanted to be when I grew up. That conversation laid the first brick on my path to a life with options.

I didn't know it at the time, but I attended high school in a state that provides a seamless system of education for its students from preschool to college. Because of that system, I went on to be the first in my family to obtain a college degree and have spent my adult life working to provide more children the same opportunities I was afforded.

Recreating this path for more students requires two important components: 1) a pre-school, elementary, and secondary education system that provides all students with a strong academic foundation; and 2) and access to higher education for all who seek it.

I have spent most of my career focused on the first element. Along the way, I have served as a middle school teacher in schools where every single student was Black and lived in poverty. It was important to me to provide students with a living example of what's possible. I worked for then Senator Hillary Clinton and was responsible for crafting K-12 and higher education policies on her behalf. I played an integral role in the Senator's work to secure funding to train more teachers to serve in low-income communities; to provide loans directly from the federal government for college students; and to provide resources for better training and support for school leaders. I used the skills I learned in the senator's office to advocate for federal action

to improve high school graduation rates across the country. Later, while working at the Alliance for Excellent Education, I advanced a federal agenda that led to additional funding for low-performing high schools – schools like McKay High School in Salem, Oregon. McKay used these resources to expand learning time and provide multiple pathways to high school graduation, seeing a more than 15-point increase since that investment.

I currently serve as the Oregon Executive Director of Stand for Children (Stand). During my tenure at Stand, I have created and executed an advocacy agenda that will provide equitable access to opportunities for low-income students and students of color. This work includes statutory changes to increase instructional time for high school students; authoring and shepherding a successful statewide ballot measure to improve high school graduation rates; and securing over \$470 million in state funding to provide additional support and resources to high schools in every corner of this state. Today, Oregon's high school graduation rate stands at an all-time high. More students are reaching the starting line.

As a trustee for the University of Oregon, I hope to use my knowledge of systems change and a strong focus on equity to ensure that a college degree is accessible. And I look forward to having the opportunity to use those skills to work on behalf of the state's flagship university.

Thank you for your consideration.

Toya Fick